

# Collaboration Dynamics

**Dr. Manuel Angel (Coco) Morales**

Why is it so challenging to create, manage and sustain an environment of real collaboration, even among people who ostensibly have similar purpose and goals? Social scientists have clearly stated that creating a culture or an environment of collaboration requires changing two interactive factors:

1. Conversations by which people interact (if there is no crucial conversation real collaboration is impossible).
2. The structure (pattern of organization) that shape those conversations.

Both of these factors are determined by individual mental models.

Collaboration is a mutual beneficial relationship between two or more parties that work together toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability in order to achieve results. The purpose is to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview to any particular party. This form of interaction was initially modeled as the confluence of effective participation of all actors, meaning a combination of engagement and effort in the collaborative process.

**COLLABORATION= ENGAGEMENT + SUSTAINED EFFORT**

The revised framework of collaboration stresses the combination of the accumulation of the actors' ability to work with each other. The ability to work with each other, only if cultivated, accumulates over time as a function of sustained effort, perceived risk, and interaction with each other in an organizational setting.

The 2010 approach to collaboration is the confluence of the engagement of the parties involved. The empirical proposition is that the higher the engagement, the higher the collaboration.

A piece of critical reflection is that we are in the knowledge and learning society (tell me what you really know and what you are learning, and this will determine your potential for performance and success.) Thus, collaboration becomes a function of the constant interaction of KNOWLEDGE, ENGAGEMENT, RESULTS, PERCEPTIONS OF TRUST, AND THE ACCUMULATION OF ACTIVITY AND WORK OVER TIME. The way to improve collaboration is to pay serious attention of how knowledge is managed in collaboration efforts, how results are produced and understood, and how communication can enable the creation of trust (Francis Fukuyama, Trust).

I was part of the team that invited Chris Argyris to come to the University of Puerto Rico in the early eighties to lecture on what makes collaboration so problematic. Argyris' research **Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness** offered an interesting explanation about why collaboration is so complex. To collaborate effectively, people have to shift their mind-set from one of control to one of learning. However, collaboration is often psychologically threatening because it requires us, among others, to give up our preconceived ideas about what the solutions should be in order to find more significant responses that take full advantage of the collaboration itself. This adventure is never about an ego trip, but about having passion for creative knowledge and innovative solutions. UNDER CONDITIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THREAT, PEOPLE CLING TO THE VERY MIND-SET THAT MAKES EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION LESS LIKELY. Mental models can undermine or facilitate the outcome people say they want to achieve.

In order to facilitate an environment of real collaboration, it is necessary to design a mutual learning process. Such a process points toward four core dimensions: Core assumptions, principles, strategies, and consequences.

As a leader, manager or facilitator, you validate that you have knowledge and others have other intelligences; therefore, other people may see things differently. In other words, you know that you don't know all you need to know. Several key principles are associated with sharing knowledge and mutual learning processes. **Curiosity** is the constant urge to learn more

about something. **Openness** is the quality of sharing relevant knowledge, including the proposed strategies in a timely and valid manner. Joint accountability means that you share responsibility for the current situation, including the eventual consequences. Being accountable is being responsible for addressing personal problems with others directly or with the expertise knowledge of others.

The strategies that leaders use to facilitate the implementation of their initiatives and actions are ground rules for effective individual, team and organizational behavior (Roger Schwarz, Ground Rules for Effective Performance). **Stressing consequences** is about making possible several outcomes including increased quality of decisions and results, increased commitment to implementing results, reduced time for effective implementation of any initiative, improved working relationships, increased organizational learning, and enhanced personal satisfaction.

Unless you are working in a relatively new organization, you will have to confront many old structures and procedures for dealing with the task at hand. If this is the case, the work to be done is one of the redesigning existing structures and processes so that they generate the proposed outcomes to be achieved. Some quick recommendations are very important:

- Identify elements that are within your control.
- Understand exactly what the structure and processes say and don't say.
- Explore redesigns in accordance with mutual, joint, teaming learning experiences.

At the end, when about 70% of the pressures an organization receives come from the outside world, everything has to do with collaboration dynamics. It is about the ability of collaborative partners to bend and remain flexible and adaptive under pressure so that their work can maintain momentum despite challenges.

**Dr. Manuel Angel (Coco) Morales**

Contact Freelance at: [cocomorales1@gmail.com](mailto:cocomorales1@gmail.com)

Cell phone: 787- 249-6102